

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency
Department of Employment Benefits and Services, CalWORKs Employment Services

County Government Center, East Wing
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, California 95110



Santa Clara County – Intern & Earn Executive Summary 2025 CSAC Challenge Awards

Overview – Intern & Earn provides meaningful work opportunities to eligible youth who are receiving County services. Interns develop skills and gain experience in a supported environment.

Challenge – The County of Santa Clara (County) sought a way to address generational poverty for young people in the CalWORKs and Foster Care programs. For many young people, Intern & Earn is their first employment experience, therefore support is needed to navigate the program from application to placement. The County has met this need by providing supported employment to vulnerable youth already being served by the Social Services Agency. Intern & Earn has helped to expose participating youth to experience employment—a key factor associated with better outcomes in adulthood.

Solution – Leveraging local and CalWORKs dollars, an in-house program was created to handle all aspects of recruitment, job development, and payroll. Youth have an assigned Employment Counselor to guide and support them through the application process, job matching and placement, and subsequently provide retention support throughout the eight-week program. The Department of Employment and Benefits Services (DEBS) and the Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFCS) have developed a strong cross-departmental partnership which blends CalWORKs and foster youth into one program. Interns are placed on public and private worksites, with the County serving as the employer of record. The County also hosts interns across many departments and programs; having the County as the employer of record is a welcome feature for many of our partner worksites, easing concerns and facilitating their participation.

Innovation – Intern & Earn is innovative as we have been able to leverage CalWORKs expanded subsidized employment (ESE) funds, as well as local dollars approved by the Board of Supervisors. Keeping job development, recruitment, payroll and other related program functions in-house allows us greater control, flexibility, and quicker responses to issues as they arise. This is a true collaboration across

departments for intern referral and County worksites, and dozens of employers for non-profit and private worksites. Intern & Earn is a testament to the power of community engagement.

Results - Intern & Earn is in its ninth year, including the recently completed summer cohort. Over 270 interns have participated in the program, with a 90% completion rate. Interns worked over 40,000 hours across 86 worksites. Tens of thousands of hours of experience were gained, and hundreds of thousands of dollars earned—helping support our most vulnerable households. Considering the multiple cohorts per year, it demonstrates the significant impact the program has had on youth, families, host organizations, and the community. Intern & Earn has helped DEBS increase community engagement through these employment partnerships.

Replicability – Intern & Earn can be replicated by leveraging ESE funding and dedicating some local resources to support the participating youth. The same program structure for our adult paid work experience program was used to create and support Intern & Earn. This program has a positive impact on youth, families, and the community.

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Additional Materials –

- [Intern & Earn Website](#)
- Visit our [YouTube channel](#) to view videos about the programs, highlights, and videos made by our interns!